THE VALUE AND LIMITATIONS OF FROEBEL'S GIFTS AS EDUCATIVE MATERIALS PARTS III, IV, V

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PART III

THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS ATTAINED BY FROEBEL IN ATTEMPTING TO APPLY HIS EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLES TO THE USE OF MATERIALS IN THE KINDERGARTEN

Froebel's attempt to apply his philosophy gives evidence of both his greatness and his limitations, his strength and weakness as an educator.

In common with all great inventors, his applications often violate his principles. His greatness lies in his effort to put all his theories and application to the severest test.

He not only tested them himself in work and play with children, but urged his co-workers to bring him the criticism resulting from experience in using them.

In spite of this earnest attempt to test the value of his theories in experience, disappointment awaits any student who imagines that even a genius can entirely reconstruct earlier habits of educational practice by the leavening influence of the most regenerating and revolutionary theory. Froebel's embodiments of his philosophical theories as a guide for the practical procedure of the home and the kindergarten are to be found mainly in three volumes: *The Mother-Play, The Pedagogics of the Kindergarten,* and *Education by Development.*

The *Mother-Play* is a practical exposition of Froebel's theory of the educative process as one of interaction or interplay between the insight, wisdom, and experience of the mother and the native instincts, the blind impulses, and the inexperience of the child, which, through the medium of plays and games, are to be illuminated with the significance and meaning of social life.

A study of these three volumes would seem to indicate that Froebel had more successfully applied this theory of interaction in his plays and games than in his methods for the use of the gifts and occupations in the other two volumes. The following criticisms of the practical procedure of the kindergarten as laid down in *The Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* and *Education by Development* might be offered.

a) Though the Froebelian theory of knowledge was that it should grow out of the needs of the child's life, and come to consciousness through the child's own activities, in these volumes we find him frequently falling back into the practice of giving instruction and information unrelated to the needs of child life and in no way leading to an increasing appreciation or control of the child's own experience. "Knowledge," he says, "is for the purpose of use in life," and yet he plans plays with his gifts in which geometric knowledge and philosophical abstractions were sung to the child through an educative process in which the self-activity of the mother or teacher, much more than that of the child, is developed. Being deeply interested in the philosophic and geometric problems of space, we find such extraneous information as the following imposed upon the child:

> The sphere takes up the space you see,
> So where it is the cube cannot be.[14]

Again in a play with the cube:

> Though one side was all you saw,
> Yet my hand shut up five more.[15]

Or as in another play

> I twist and turn, go high and low,
> Three sides at once is all I show.

Here we have quite the method of "object-teaching," a method Froebel was earnestly attempting to supersede with activity as a substitute for sense impression.

b) Froebel's intuitive insight into the educational value of the symbol inspired an enthusiasm which frequently led him to

[14] *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten*, p. 79.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

read artificial symbolic meanings into simple natural facts; and betrayed him into puerile applications of an inspiring, but ill-understood educational value.

c) Froebel's attempt to relate and unify all the experiences of the child lead to his idea of unified playthings— the gifts. It was believed that the external unity embodied in the gifts, based upon geometric evolution, would lead to inner unity, especially if these unified materials were used in a related method ("sequence plays"). Some of the methods suggested by Froebel would seem to be based upon the desire to bring to the child's consciousness the geometric unity embodied in the gifts. Thus the geometric analysis of the material leads not only into intricate and complex divisions, but to play materials so small and limiting as to call forth the criticism of the psychologist and the hygienist.

The criticism has been made that the gifts are more logical than psychological—the unity being embodied in the materials, rather than in furnishing that more living unity—the unity between the impulses of the child and complementary materials. Thus the method of using these materials has often degenerated into artificial and unnatural methods of dictating to the child certain definite ways of handling and using them which would lead to the consciousness of the geometric relations and unity of which they are an embodiment. In other words instead of these materials being used as a means of organizing the child's present experiences, illuminating them so as to bring to the child's consciousness the unity of life, they were used to increase his consciousness of the unity in the material.

With all the fair criticisms that may be passed upon the gifts, the attempt to select materials in the light of a high standard of merit was most unique and worthy, and, after all, is still the most notable effort in this line.

Some of the gifts are much more successful than others, and, provided they may be used on the basis of selection and elimination, rather than as a related whole whose value is lost if the "charmed circle" of unity be broken, they are and ever will be materials of great worth in the education of the little child.

PART IV

SOME PRESENT-DAY CONCEPTIONS OF THE AIM OF MATERIALS IN THE KINDERGARTEN

It is interesting to compare the conception of some of the contemporary leaders of education with the Froebelian ideal of the educative process as the reciprocal relation, the "give-and-take" between the maturity of the teacher and the immaturity of the child. The constitutive elements in this interchange were (1) the impulse, the activity, the need manifested by the child; and (2) the standard, the interpretation, the insight contributed by the teacher, the adult, in the modification and reconstruction of the child's experience.

The Baroness von Bülow gives the spirit of this in her *Reminiscences of Froebel:*

> Therefore it is of the greatest importance that the understanding of the grown-up should come to the help of the dark striving of the young child, in order to point out to the blind impulses that are endeavoring to express themselves the right way of reaching their aim.[17]

Dr. John Dewey gives as his conception of the educative process,

> The fundamental factors in the educative process are an immature, undeveloped being; and certain social aims and meanings incarnate in the matured experience of the adult. The educative process is the due interaction of these forces. Such a conception of each in relation to the other as facilitates completest and freest interaction is the essence of educational theory.[18]

The early manifestations of self-activity are in the form of native instincts and impulses. To the child these are mere tendencies and impulses to act with no future beyond their own pleasurable results; to the teacher they are indications of awakening powers and interests which with a guidance in accord with their significance and possibilities may lead to all the values in the accepted curriculum and the standards of worth in an intelligent society and civilization.

While the impulses of the child are the only points of de-

[17] P. 105.

[18] *The Child and the Curriculum,* pp. 7, 8.

parture in a self-active process of education, they must be accepted only upon a basis of selection and elimination in the light of the judgment passed upon them in the experience of an enlightened civilization. When isolated from the part their higher development has played in the creation and preservation of the signal achievements of civilization, impulses stand on a level of merit with no principle of selection; but when they are tested in the accomplishment of the elevation or degradation of society, education is in a position to elect only those which are worthy of a position of dignity in the activities of the school.

Dr. Cole thus expresses the relation of impulses and instincts to the curriculum:

> Freedom in education seems to be that instincts and impulses are to be utilized, not eliminated. For these are the obvious contributions of the self to the educative process. If they be not respected, or in some way maintained, it is difficult to see how there should be talk of freedom. Yet it is one thing to respect instincts and impulses, and another to admire them as they blindly perform an unassisted work. . . . . Then instincts and impulses may be thought of, not as the opposites to ends, ideals, or values so much as the possibilities and cravings for these very realizations and satisfactions. The educational situation ought then to be, not impulses versus the curriculum, but impulses for it.[19]

Miss Blow states the Froebelian conception of the relation of the impulsive manifestations of the child in play to the achievements of civilization:

> Through his study of the different forms of childish play Froebel became aware of the fact that some of them point toward the practical arts, some toward the fine arts, some toward science and literature and some toward the ethical life of man as incarnated in social institutions. In these creations of the human spirit Froebel found his standards of value. In different native forms of play he recognized the germinal tendencies of which these values are the higher expression.[20]

In the light of this discussion of the relation of impulses to their mature forms of expression, one might submit the following line of thought:

a) The most far-reaching instincts, those with the most varied implications in their later emergence in the curriculum

[19] Percival Cole, *Froebel and Herbart*, p. 33.

[20] *Educational Issues in the Kindergarten*, p. 143.

and in social life, seem to be: (1) The impulse to communicate—conversation;[21] (2) The impulse to find out—inquiry; (3) The impulse to make—construction; (4) The impulse to artistic expression—arts.

b) The two essential points to be emphasized here are: First, impulses are self-contributions to the educative process, and should culminate in the spiritual investments of civilization—art, science, industry, institutions, and religion; second, as preserved by civilization these achievements represent the same impulses that are germinal in the child, emerging on higher planes of creativity sifted of the trivial and the transient, and thus representing the eternal values of human progress on its highest level.

c) While these achievements are the educational inheritance of the child, civilization's bequest of its noblest and best, they can be appropriated by him only through a self-active process of reproduction, through the creative development of the same germinal powers, emerging on higher levels in the curriculum and social progress. In other words, the child must re-create before he can appreciate, must reinvent before he can appropriate and win his inheritance through his own self-active powers.

d) To reachieve, to re-create and reinvent on the lower levels of development demands material as a stimulus and necessary condition to this creative process.

e) The differentiations of the creative impulse as manifested in art, science, industry, etc., together with the different phases of this impulse from which they spring, require as their counterpart a differentiation of materials for two reasons: (1) the ends to be attained—art, science, industry, etc., require for their realization certain specific materials so that each may find its own legitimate medium of expression. (2) The early manifestations of these impulses which culminate in the varied arts and industries require differentiation of materials as nourishment and as the condition of their activity.

f) This differentiation of materials, to meet the requirements of the ends to be attained and to supply the nourishment and

[21] Dewey, *School and Society*, p. 57.

activity of the germinating impulses, would result in a unified but not closely organized system of selected materials. Here the unity would be, not only a unity in and among the organized materials (in that no one could supply the need for the other), but would meet the psychological requirement of unity between the impulses of the child and materials.

In an all-round education all these worthy instincts are to be fed and started on the upward way to their goal. If any one is omitted or unduly sacrificed to another we rob (1) the child of its individual development and inheritance; (2) society of its right to receive from its members the contributions necessary to its fullest maintenance.

PART V

SOME PRESENT-DAY CONCEPTIONS OF THE APPLICATION OF FROEBELIAN PRINCIPLES TO THE USE OF MATERIALS IN THE KINDERGARTEN

If the Froebelian conception of the educative process as one of developing interaction between the child and the teacher in a social environment be accepted, this demands four essential factors: (1) the self-active child; (2) child society; (3) the enlightened and sympathetic guide or teacher; (4) educative materials as selected stimuli to the interaction process between child, children and teacher.

That we may realize the organic unity in which these elements cohere, let us imagine certain abnormal conditions where some are withheld. First, imagine a normal, self-active child without suitable materials as an outlet for his creative impulse; second, add to this situation the educative materials without child-society or mature guidance; third, imagine the self-active child provided with educative materials, under mature guidance and withhold child-society—the ideal social situation in which all of these function; fourth, and finally, place the self-active child in child-society where selected educative materials are provided as stimuli to social interaction under the guidance of an enlightened, sympathetic, mature guide, and you have Froebel's ideal process of education.

With these factors in an organically related whole let us consider the function of each to the other and the whole—especially the relation of children to child, and of teacher to children and child. What does the presence of social equals, with like impulses, powers, privileges and rights imply to the child? What is the function of the teacher in adjusting these to each other in the educational situation?

These might be answered by asking a counter question—What are the different ways in which society demands social co-operation in preserving the rights of all its members to lead and to follow, to be led and to be followed? Society would seem to demand social co-operation in these four typical ways: (1) ability to co-operate with one's equals in working out purposes suggested, offered or planned by a superior; (2) Ability to secure the co-operation of others in working out one's own purposes; (3) Ability to co-operate with others in working out a purpose suggested by one's equals; (4) Ability to co-operate with others in working out a plan made up of purposes suggested by the different members of the social group, with or without the guidance of a superior.

There is much discussion in education at present as to the possibility of maintaining individual freedom and development under conditions where the ego is working out purposes which are not self-originated. This would be more easily answered if man were not social as well as individual in his nature, and if man did not often realize self through adopted purposes in social co-operation. Also the significance of suggestion and imitation in the development of individuality would have to be reckoned with.

The origin and development of purpose in child-life, and its relations to social suggestion, social co-operation and the demands of democratic society are too subtle and too vast to attempt to discuss. However one might venture to state that in child-life purpose gradually emerges out of: (*a*) originally aimless activity, (*b*) accidental activities, representations and arrangements, (*c*) imitation and suggestion from (1) equals and (2) superiors.

In the light of the problems of democracy the following practical methods might be submitted as an economic means of preserving for each individual in child-society the right to lead, to follow and to co-operate with one's equals under the guidance of a superior.

1. Each child may be provided with materials for experimentation with no purpose suggested by the teacher or the other children. Here each child works as an individual with no direct attempt to develop the sense of group.

2. The teacher looks over what each child has done to grasp the first opportunity to suggest purpose, or possibilities of purpose in some accidental representation, arrangement, or activity which has been stumbled upon by the child.

3. The teacher suggests a purposeful repetition of an activity originally aimless.

4. Teacher suggests that the children each should look at the other's representations or arrangements to discover possible purpose each in the other's work.

5. The teacher suggests a standard of "better" and "best" and with that in mind has the children select which of the varied contributions is the best to adopt as a social purpose for the whole.

6. The teacher suggests a child-like purpose to the whole group—(*a*) All making the same representation in the same form; or, (*b*) All making the same representation in a variety of forms; or, (*c*) All making different things to contribute to a common end or plan demanding individuality and social co-operation through a variety of social contributions.

These are purely suggestive and are only a few of many means the thoughtful teacher might use in her effort to develop individual initiative, self-determination, and leadership while seeking to increase and deepen the child's sense of kind, group, consciousness, and co-operation on a gradually ascending scale.

Democratic society demands this sane balance between the right of the individual and the social good, under the conditions of freedom and development. Here we have interaction between the individual and society as the social situation and requirement.

Hence with this goal in mind the school should gradually develop the little individualistic ego, with latent social tendencies into its social privilege of working *under, over,* or *with* its equals under conditions of freedom and development.

Mazzini tells us that "democracy is the progress of all, through all, under the leadership of the best and wisest."